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## NOTES AND COMMENTS.

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### A TOOTHLESS AND HAIRLESS RACE.

"TEETH strong, even, and white as those of a savage," is the novelist's hackneyed description of one of his hero's chief physical charms. The fossil jaws of prehistoric man show molars and incisors worn half-way to the sockets indeed, but generally unbroken in number and free from caries. Civilized man has a larger and more deeply convoluted brain, a less oblique facial angle, a more rounded tibia, a less protruding heel, and a finer nose than the typical savage, modern or prehistoric; but in the matter of teeth he is immeasurably his inferior. What a pity that the refining processes which have sculptured his lips into such exquisite curves should have made such havoc within them! that the divine beauty of his smile should be so often more than neutralized by the sepulchral ruin it reveals!

And in the matter of hair, too, one sex at least has been a great sufferer from civilization. Compare the male European or American head of to-day, fertile enough within, but so often a scalpy desert without, with the thickly-thatched cranium of the Asiatic or the African.

The oft-repeated conclusion of the biologists is inevitable: the processes that have produced such results will continue until civilized man becomes an absolutely toothless and hairless race.

What then? Will there be a deterioration of health and beauty? Will our descendants, more or less remote, become a race of prematurely-old men and women? The life-history of the individual is repeated in that of the species. Is that the destined Old Age of the human species when every individual will bear throughout his life these conspicuous marks of decrepitude? Or will the destined change be only one more step towards a higher organization, a more finely-developed and vital manhood? It will not be the first great physical change through which our race has passed since it was clothed with hair from top to toe, had great fangs in its jaws, moved its pointed ears at will, and was decorated with a tail. It is not difficult to imagine the time when our remote ancestors first noticed that the coats of shining silky hair which covered their bodies were beginning to grow thin. Perhaps it was at the same time that their graceful and convenient tails were growing shorter and less flexible. With what concern they must have observed the increasing baldness of their shoulders and sides, and how they must have missed the support as well as beauty of their lost or abbreviated caudal appendages!

As their successors supply the deficiencies of nature with scalp-wigs and artificial teeth, so no doubt they made hairy coverings "perfectly simulating nature" to conceal the ugly bald spots on their bodies, and perhaps eked out their shortened tails with artificial supplements. Who knows but that this may have hastened the adoption of the artificial clothing, hairy skins of beasts, etc., which in the course of the ages since has completed the depila-

tory process and produced the lady's smooth satiny skin, of which she is so proud?

If we can imagine those remote progenitors of ours intelligent enough to write magazine articles, how learnedly we may fancy them discoursing on the disastrous effects of deviating from the habits of primitive nature!

"Our greatly-improved and still improving means of defence against our terrestrial enemies," one of their *savants* might have written if he had possessed the erudition of to-day, "is producing its natural result. The increasing tendency of our race to abandon their natural habitat among the trees for a more indolent and luxurious life upon the ground is greatly to be deplored. We are rapidly losing the physical agility and mental alertness which characterized our fathers, and which arboreous habits alone can develop and maintain. If the tendency continues to increase, our race must necessarily deteriorate, until it will finally descend to the level of the clumsy and stupid *plantigrade*. There is even danger of at least two radical physical changes. Our diminished activity and increased luxury are rendering us more and more susceptible to climatic changes, from which we seek to protect ourselves by artificial covering. This is, no doubt, the chief cause of the body-baldness from which so large a proportion of our people suffer, especially in advanced life. Again, the walker upon the ground has little or no occasion for that graceful appendage which the swinger from tree to tree finds one of his chief necessities—his prehensile tail. Disuse, therefore, added to the abrading effect of his habit of sitting so much of his time, will eventually deprive him of this beautiful and, in the design of nature, most necessary appendage. Imagine a race of men with no tails, and with skins as bare all over as the palms of our four hands! Such a race, unless the tendencies are radically changed, we are inevitably destined to become."

Well, the tendencies were not radically changed, and such a race we have in great measure become. It will require only a few hundreds of generations more to render the transformation complete, when the last hairy scalp, chin, breast, and leg shall have disappeared, and the human form divine shall present from crown to sole a surface as smooth and rosy-white as an infant's cheek of to-day. The other change will have taken place, too—that which our prehistoric ancestors had no reason to foresee; the last molar, tricuspid, bicuspid, and incisor will have disappeared, and the smiling lips will reveal only two semicircles of rosy gum.

As we have already asked, will the result be a deterioration of health and beauty? With us there is, to say the least, a strong and decided prejudice in favor of luxuriant tresses and pearly teeth. But it is only a prejudice, and by no means universal. We see no lack of beauty in the infant's naked, rosy scalp, or in its sweet little toothless mouth. We even see a kind of majestic beauty in the ivory dome that covers the sage's busy brain. A white, shining billiard-ball is by no means unpleasing to the eye, and no one can fancy its beauty improved by covering half of it with a coat of hair, however soft and silky, lustrous, brown, or golden.

Birds had teeth once: how should we welcome the prospect of a return, a retrogression, to their former semi-reptilian condition? Would you think your canary or your brilliant-hued cockatoo improved in its appearance if the smooth, even edges of its bill were garnished with saws of pearly teeth, like a little feathered and winged alligator?

The possession of a full complement of teeth has always been regarded as an indispensable condition of perfect health. To our prehistoric ancestors,

who had no other grain-mills than their molars, it must have been so, and the modern soldier in active service would find his hard-tack and leathery salt beef rather unsatisfactory fare without the dental integrity which the examining surgeon so properly insists upon. But the constantly improving science of cookery supplies the remedy for the civilian, and as to the soldier, he is, like his teeth, a relic of undeveloped civilization. The "dogs of war" must go, teeth and all. Experience has demonstrated that the luxurious diet of civilization, which gives so little for the teeth to do, is, on the whole, more conducive to vitality and longevity than the hard fare of savagery. Long before toothless gums shall have become the rule, all occasion for teeth will have passed, either for beauty or use. The rudimentary excrescences which will ever and anon continue to appear will be looked upon as deformities, and will be promptly removed. Those rare individuals from the uttermost parts of the earth who shall be able to show a complete set of fully-developed teeth will be exhibited as "freaks," as the hairy wild man of Australia is exhibited to-day—relics of a former bestial stage of humanity.

Meanwhile the transition state of our race from the beauty of luxuriant hair and perfect teeth to the beauty of satin-smooth scalps and geometrically-perfect mandibles of delicate pink, is one of comparative ugliness, analogous to the moulting period of the feathered tribes.

EDWARD P. JACKSON.

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#### AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE AMERICAN NEGRO.

THE development of Africa excites in the Christian world to-day a more common and widespread interest than any other subject. It is shared in a greater or less degree by nearly all nations, classes, and religious bodies. The recent partition of great portions of the continent between the European powers, as well as the formation of commercial companies for founding new empires in its depths, is the result, not the cause, of this interest. This of itself would prove that it is no merely sentimental feeling which shrinks from action; but beyond and higher than this is the fact that great numbers of men, as far apart as English and American university graduates and French peasants, stand ready to make any needed sacrifice, even of life itself, to help it on. It was only a few days, for instance, after Cardinal Lavigerie suggested raising a semi-religious *gendarmerie* for the purpose of a forcible repression of the slave-trade that more than a thousand men volunteered to go to almost certain death in this service. When one missionary falls at his post, ten are eager to fill his place. Though it is true that most of the explorers, traders, prospectors, and adventurers who are pressing from all directions into the interior are actuated only by personal motives, yet the Christian world at large has no other wish than to see a magnificent continent opened to civilization, its wealth made available, and the "open sore" of the world healed.

There is one notable and significant exception to this common interest of all Christian peoples in the redemption of Africa. The educated and well-to-do American negro alone seems to be apathetic and indifferent; or, if he has any interest in Africa, it is purely sentimental. Though I have had occasion to become unusually familiar with what has been done in that continent during the last fifty years or more, I cannot call to mind a single instance of an American negro who has gone to Africa from the noble motives which have led tens of hundreds of white men to make their graves in its forests and swamps. This indifference is, to me at least, inexplicable. In the North